THE VALUES OF A CREATIVE WRITING EXPERIENCE AS SEEN BY EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS AND PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANTS

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by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Educators for many years have talked and written much about the values of creative writing for school youngsters. Little, however, has been said about what the students think are the values of creative writing.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The purpose of this study was (1) to determine the values of a creative writing experience as seen by eighth grade students; (2) to obtain an evaluation of this program from a current group, as well as from those who had been away from the program more than nine months; and (3) to obtain from participating students, evaluations which would be studied by professional consultants closely connected with the curriculum and the faculty.

Importance of the study. Often a youngster, already stimulated, has contributions to make, opinions to offer, or questions to ask, but he has no real opportunity to do so in the classroom. Time to write whatever is on a student's mind seems necessary in today's changing society in order for him to gain insight and a better understanding of himself.

II. DEFINITION

Creative Writing. Creative Writing means writing done in an atmosphere created jointly by the classroom teacher and pupils, with no topic ever assigned, no particular form required, and no grade applied to any work.

III. LIMITATION

This study covered a three-year period and was limited to the eighth grade classes of better than average ability in English, according to the placements made by administrators of the B. R. Miller Junior High School, Marshalltown, Iowa. Placements were based on intelligence tests, achievement scores, personal knowledge, and recommendations from classroom teachers as collected by the counseling department. A total of five classes and 139 pupils were involved.

IV. PROCEDURE

Creative Writing was scheduled one period a week in lieu of the regular English or literature class. Therefore, since five days work needed to be accomplished in four days, the experiment was limited to the upper level ability groups.

The first class in 1965 included nineteen girls and five boys and was extended to two classes on each of the next two years.

	Girls	Boys	Total
1965-1966	19	5	24
1966-1967	13	18	31
	17	11	28
1967-1968	13	14	27
	22	7	29
	84	55	139

The procedure for each class was the same. A good classroom rapport was first established and a group project in writing was experienced. The success of the group project became the commencement of several months of individual endeavors.

Through pupil-teacher planning, each Monday was set aside for writing. The selecting of a topic was a challenge since no single topic or choice of topics was offered. Decision-making is a natural part of growing up,[1] so practice in making a series of decisions was provided.

The class period was fifty-seven minutes long. During the week, one full period was allotted to

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[1] M. Ann Grooms, Perspectives on the Middle School, (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1967), p. 72.

Creative Writing, two periods for English, and two periods for literature. Mechanics of writing were taught in English, whereas appreciation and enrichment came mostly from literature. Communication skills carried over into Creative Writing as well as did opinions, extensions and styles from literature.

Nunan[1] provided assistance in making the series of decisions necessary in determining a topic. The idea field was divided into four general areas: People and Places, Experiences, Interests and Hobbies, and Opinions. The first decision was to select one of these. If, for example, one chose People and Places, he might choose to narrow the topic to just one, either People or Places. If it was people he chose to discuss, then it was helpful to determine how many to include such as: one person, a group, a gang, a family, or a community. If one person, which one? A family member, a neighbor, a scout leader, a television entertainer, or a character from a story, book, or movie might be chosen.

Thus, the technique was started. It was one way to narrow a possible idea to a workable topic. Other

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[1]D. J. Nunan, Composition: Models and Exercises (New York: Harcourt Brace and World Inc., 1961).

ways might be tried and might prove more effective, but this technique is a good beginning.

The articles written were usually short, so the actual thinking and writing time consumed approximately one-half the period. During this time, students were very quiet. This behavior was group employed and group maintained. When one finished, he could exchange writings with a willing neighbor.

Students were encouraged to write anything. We had such types as: descriptions, plays, poems, limericks, prayers, letters, imaginative pieces, opinions, wonderings, fears, problems with and without conclusions, biographies, self-analyses, and diaries. Stimulation came from their past experiences, their questioning, thought wandering, and new sensual cognizance of their surroundings.

This investigator feels it would be difficult for any single teacher to select a topic or a list of topics that would set a class of twenty-five or thirty students to writing with as much enthusiasm as subjects did after they learned how to select their own topics.

It is not to be assumed that there is not a place for teacher-selected topics in classes other than Creative Writing. It is, rather, that much freedom to

choose be offered students at this adolescent stage when they want to write.[1]

After the articles were written, each proofread his own work and corrected any spelling errors. Movement about the room was not permitted during the writing period. Papers were handed in in their original forms. The teacher read them and often made personal comments such as pointing out something particularly interesting or enjoyable, a point of disagreement, an additional source of information, or an answer to a question, if the youngster really wanted one. These comments proved to be excellent rapport and self-security builders.

The idea of respect for the individual is vitally important. Papers were usually returned the same day they were written, but, before they were returned, some were read to the class. If the author did not wish to have his read, his wish was respected. Oftentimes the item could be read if the author was left anonymous. Those articles which the student did not care to share with anyone but the teacher were put in a special file to which only the teacher had access.

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[1]Arnold Gesell, and others, Youth: The Years From Ten to Sixteen (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), pp. 144-149.

Each youngster had a folder in an open file at the back of the room. After the article was copied in ink, he filed it. Anyone could read what was in the open files.

Committees were formed to determine use of the files. Some items were put on the bulletin board, some for the school paper, and others were singled out for use in a culmination program. Authors were consulted before any display or publication was made.

Toward the close of each school year, the current class was asked, "What do you think are the values of Creative Writing? List ten or fifteen items." There was 100 per cent return on these. Each class involved in the study was asked to again evaluate the program as ninth and as tenth graders. "Now that you have been away from the program one (two) year (years), list ten or fifteen things you think are the values of Creative Writing." The return on these evaluations averaged ninety-five per cent. The third evaluation was obtained through the assistance of a high school counselor, since subjects were sophomores in the Marshalltown High School building.

The total program was of interest to the elementary consultant and the in-resident coordinator. The elementary consultant was a guest at the culmination programs

for the two classes of 1966-1967. The coordinator had close contact with the program when he placed a student teacher in this classroom.

At the close of the three-year program the consultant, coordinator, and the classroom teacher made a study of the student evaluations. An inter-rater reliability check was used. The ten most frequently mentioned values of Creative Writing were thus determined.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Within this chapter, the investigator will review professional literature pertinent to the physical and psychological status of the eighth grade student and the relevancy of a Creative Writing experience to that status.

Much has been written on general psychology, child development, and creativity. Some understanding of the first is essential in working successfully with the second and the third. Briefly, psychology, the study of the mind, reveals that man has never ceased to wonder about himself. Although many definitions of psychology have been offered, including the one given in 1890 by William James who believed it was a "science of mental life, both of its phenomena and of their conditions,"[1] no single definition has been acceptable. The point of agreement among them, however, is that psychology is "an empirical science dealing with mental activities and objective behavior."[2]

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[1]Philip Lawrence Harriman, The New Dictionary of Psychology (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), p. 274.

[2]Ibid.

A child is an individual in the process of becoming an adult and is made up of heredity, environment, and the responses he makes to these two. His basic drive is for the preservation of self which is "distinctive of the human animal and is probably the most important thing to any individual."[1] Basic drive must be controlled by adjustments that bring about behavior acceptable to our society. An adjusted person has learned to capitalize on his strengths and accept his weaknesses. "A cardinal principle of obtaining and retaining mental health is that reality must be faced squarely."[2] Through emotions our lives become purposeful, interesting and complex. Because ego, as well as society, dictate to the emotions, a common ground must be found for each individual's self. Proper development of self requires the use of defense mechanisms which are natural and normal reactions. The classroom teacher who knows and understands this is in a position to help the child work out his own solutions.

Each human being needs security, a certain degree of skill in one or more things, and the need for status.

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[1]Herbert A. Carroll, Mental Hygiene (second edition; New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954), p. vii.

[2]Ibid., p. 18.

Teaching thus becomes more than an instructional process while helping each child along the difficult path of becoming an adult.

"Creative" means "having the power or quality of creating,"[1] and "create" means "to bring into being; to cause to exist . . . to produce as a work of thought or imagination, especially as a work of art."[2] Writing refers to any written work. Creative Writing, however, refers to the individual's own inhibited or uninhibited responses put on paper.

Thinking must precede writing. Torrance defined creative thinking as "the process of sensing gaps or disturbing missing elements; forming ideas concerning them, testing these hypotheses."[3] Sir Frederick Bartlett called it, "adventurous thinking, or getting away from the main track out of the mold, being open to experience, and permitting one thing to lead to another."[4]

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[1] Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (fifth edition; Springfield: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1941), p. 238.

[2] Ibid.

[3] E. Paul Torrance, "Creativity," (Washington, D. C.: American Education Research Association of the National Educational Association, 1956), pp. 12-13.

[4] Sir Frederick Bartlett as quoted by William F. White and Robert E. Williams, "Identification of Creativity and the Criterion Problem," Journal of Secondary Education, (January, 1965), 275-281.

Without an understanding of child development, the purposes for creative writing cannot be clearly defined and the results may not be as complete or effective as we would like them to be. Since "instinctive insight is too personal to be fashioned by someone else,"[1] we must let the child write his ideas. He is the only one with his particular set of thoughts.

Gesell and others have done a trilogy covering the years from infancy to sixteen. Forty areas of behavior were studied in ten major fields of child development. Several thousand behavior patterns were identified. The authorities found the eleven year old, approximately of grade six, to be a bit restless, with bursts of energy, and intervals of fatigue. The twelve year old, of grade seven, is more adaptable than the ten or eleven year old, has a longer attention span, is enthusiastic, is curious and wants a teacher who can teach. The thirteen year old, or the eighth grader and the object of this study, shows a strong tendency to evaluate what he observes and learns. His experiences are more inwardized, his thinking is somewhat deeper, he tends to be critical, he wants to

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[1]Hughes Mearns, Creative Youth (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1925), p. 27.

feel independent of his teachers, he may even be belligerent in spite of a genuine respect for the teacher. He has a deep, many-sided curiosity which, if encouraged, could lead to discovery and self-direction.

With his appetite for knowledge, the thirteen year old enjoys discussions and debate at a somewhat higher analytical level. Often he writes better than he talks, although the reverse was true at ages ten and eleven. He likes to write stories about himself.[1] On many accounts he is in a very interesting educational phase and is seemingly a likely one to enjoy Creative Writing.

The fourteen year old has an interest in academic work which seems almost secondary to his yen for socialization. He likes to do a great deal of evaluating of his companions and of himself. He is eager to know more about himself and human nature in general.

In summary of the research, as it affected this study, it was realized that some eighth graders may be more like the seventh graders and some may be more like ninth graders. They should be good subjects for this

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[1] Arnold Gesell, and others, Youth: The Years From Ten to Sixteen (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), pp. 144-149.

study since the twelve year old is curious, the thirteen year old often writes better than he talks, and the fourteen year old likes to evaluate both himself and his peers.[1]

Jersild states that "Youth is a time of great possibility. But for many it is also a time of trial."[2] Adolescents must face the fact that although they grow up, the trials of life, to a greater or lesser degree, still prevail. For this reason, teenagers need to be carefully guided in laying the foundation for realistic adult years. They must learn not to blame themselves for conditions beyond their control, that they are not above displaying anger or fear, or that they are devoid of conflicting desires. They must feel that they have a right to have ideas, aspirations, and wishes of their own. They should not mind failing at times while trying to succeed.

By providing a time of experiment in a classroom, through trial and error in an atmosphere where experimenting was encouraged, and where the pressure for a

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[1] Ibid., pp. 3-10.

[2] Arthur T. Jersild, The Psychology of Adolescence (second edition; New York: Macmillan Company, 1963), p. viii.

grade was of no concern, it seemed reasonable to expect that these subjects could have experiences of value.

I. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

It was believed that students at the eighth grade level should prove to be good subjects on which to try Creative Writing because they, supposedly, often write better than they speak before their peers.[1]

If decision-making is a natural facet of the growing up process,[2] the opportunity to have time to think and make decisions should prove of value to them.

Since all students were of above average ability and since one-fifth of the class periods would be devoted to this experiment, it was hypothesized that these pupils could do their regular class work in four days instead of five.

It was further hypothesized by this investigator that the students would enjoy this activity and would be able to list several things they thought are the values of Creative Writing.

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[1] Gesell, loc. cit.

[2] M. Ann Grooms, Perspectives on the Middle School (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1967), p. 72.

In the evaluations provided by students over a period of one or two years, it was hypothesized that one would find the same values, with possibly a few additional ones, such as the value of the training for future school work and a growing appreciation for authors.

CHAPTER III

REPORT OF DATA

Within this chapter, the investigator will report the evaluations of the Creative Writing Program by the subject groups as interpreted by the three professional evaluators of the program.

To determine the reliability of rating the values offered by the 139 students, the elementary consultant, the coordinator for student teachers, and the investigator took a random sample of ten papers from each of the six sets of evaluations and separately determined the ten most often mentioned values. The seventy per cent agreement of the raters' interpretations is indication of the reliability of their findings. The ratings, therefore, were an appropriate empirical method for analyzing values, as seen by students in their own Creative Writing.

The random sample distribution included thirty first-year evaluations, twenty second-year evaluations, and ten third-year evaluations, for a total of sixty:

	First Evaluation	Second Evaluation	Third Evaluation
Group I	10	10	10
Group II	10	10	
Group III	10		

A composite list of ten items was determined from the values each rater found most often mentioned in each of the six sets of evaluations. The three evaluators grouped the student responses under categories.

1. The first category was "Freedom of expression" in which was placed such student responses as "free of restrictions," "the freedom to use one's imagination," "the freedom to use any type of form or style," "a chance to choose our own topics," and "the freedom to explore new ideas." This category included fifty-seven responses from the subjects, the highest incidence of response as shown by Table I.

2. "Enjoyment" was the raters' category for expressions such as "It was fun." This category likewise included fifty-seven student responses, the highest response incidence.

3. "Emotional outlet" was the category involving such student responses as "relieves tension," "understand self better," "gets things off your chest," "you can say what you want to say without fear of contradiction or criticism," and "there is no grade." This category included fifty-four student responses, the third highest response incidence.

TABLE I

INCIDENCE OF STUDENT REPORTED VALUES OF CREATIVE WRITING EXPERIMENT, MILLER JUNIOR HIGH, MARSHALLTOWN, IOWA, 1965-1968

VALUES	Times values mentioned in random sample by classes number: 1* 1966	1967	1968	2** & 3** 1967	1968	4 & 5 1968	Total Response
1. Freedom of expression	7	10	10	10	10	10	57
2. Enjoyment	7	10	10	10	10	10	57
3. Emotional outlet	7	10	10	8	9	10	54
4. Makes one think	6	10	9	10	10	10	54
5. Develops communication skills	5	10	10	10	10	9	54
6. Share with others	4	10	8	6	9	8	45
7. Inspiration for further study	4	9	9	5	6	5	38
8. Time to think	3	6	7	5	6	5	28
9. New awareness of self and surroundings	3	5	6	4	5	5	28
10. New appreciation for authors and their works	3	4	6	3	4	4	24

*members of class 1 responded in 1966, 1967, 1968
**members of classes 2 and 3 responded in both 1967 and 1968

4. The fourth category was "Makes one think," and included student responses such as "teaches us to use our heads so we can do things without being told," "makes us discipline ourselves," "makes one rely on oneself," "gives us practice in making decisions," and "is a good place to try thinking on our own." In this category were fifty-four student responses, third highest response incidence.

5. "Development of communication skills" was the category for such responses as "improved my spelling," "increased my vocabulary," "improved my handwriting," and "discovered more about writing sentences and paragraph construction." The frequency of comments about the development of communication skills was unexpected because nothing was said in the Creative Writing period about mechanics. The period was a definite, practical application of mechanics taught in the other four periods of the week. This category with fifty-four responses also ranked in the third highest response incidence.

6. "Share with others" was the sixth category, including remarks, "can read what others wrote," "can see how others treated a topic," and "a chance to have students other than our class read what we write." This category included forty-five student responses, the sixth highest incidence.

7. "Inspiration for further study" was the evaluators' name for the category in which students indicated a new interest in writing for the school paper and looked forward to the following year to having the chance to become editors or reporters. Student reporting a year or more after the experiment recognized the value of the training in writing speeches, term papers, and reports. The Creative Writing Program had taught them to select a topic and write the paper in a short time. Thirty-eight student responses were recorded for this category.

8. "Time to think" was appreciated by the students. The Creative Writing class was uninterrupted time. The phone, doorbell, parents, or friends would not be bothering them. This category included thirty-two student responses.

9. "New awareness of self and surroundings" showed how, through their senses, subjects became more aware of what they saw, heard, felt, smelled, or tasted. Everyday experiences became important and, seemingly, turned into a workable topic. This category included twenty-eight student responses.

10. The final category was "New appreciation for authors and their works." This was an outgrowth of the

students' having tried various kinds of writing, possibly because of cognizance of authors studied in literature, as well as from reading books for class assignments and additional work. This category was the least often mentioned of the ten categories. Twenty-four student responses were recorded.

The last five of these categories became more important to more students with the passing of time, as indicated by the response incidence by freshmen and sophomores.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was (1) to determine the values of a creative writing experience as seen by eighth grade students; (2) to obtain an evaluation of this program from a current group as well as from those who had been away from the program more than nine months; and (3) to obtain from participating students evaluations which would be studied by professional consultants closely connected with the curriculum and the faculty.

Students wrote during a fifty-seven minute class period once a week for eight months, then evaluated the program. Two second-year evaluations and one third-year evaluation were obtained from the former students. Three professional educators studied the evaluations and determined ten items most often mentioned on sixty lists taken at random.

I. CONCLUSIONS

There is sufficient evidence in the student evaluations to support the stated hypotheses. The students were willing to write. They appreciated having time to think and make decisions. All classes

successfully completed the prescribed course of work in English and literature in four days instead of five. The students enjoyed this activity and were able to list what they thought were the values of Creative Writing. Their responses of like nature were placed in categories. The ten most frequently mentioned values are: Freedom of Expression, Enjoyment, Emotional Outlet, Makes One Think, Develops Communication Skills, Share With Others, Inspiration for Further Study, Time to Think, New Awareness of Self and Surroundings, and New Appreciation for Authors and Their Works.

In the evaluations of each ninth and tenth grade group, there was an increased regard for the period of quiet and time to think on their own, the enjoyment of sharing their writings, the new awareness of themselves and their surroundings, and the new regard for authors and their works.

The tenth grade students recognized the value of the training in writing speeches, term papers, and being able to do this in a short time because they were taught how to select a topic.

The professional consultants, in separate studies of the random sample, agreed on seventy per cent of the categories in which they placed the student responses.

Both the elementary consultant, who visited two culmination programs in 1967, and the coordinator, who placed a student teacher in this classroom, agreed with the classroom teacher that the three-year program was successful and the values mentioned were valid.

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